

DECEMBER 2, 1982

Dry weather has changed the wildlife pattern in the Shortgrass Country. Deer and turkeys move in open daylight, hunting for food. Fawns are being weaned far too early to make it to ring. Hunters have to be plenty selective to find decent

On the townsite of Mertz, skunks and raccoons dominate the night life. Deer roam in the city park, but skunks, in particular, abound on the streets and vacant lots.

Child Who Sits in the Sun's dog barks long and late at the prowlers. Early in the mornings I can tell by the decrease in roosters crowing that the henhouses are being included in the influx.

As late as midsummer, chickens were a big joke around the coffee house. Those of us still maintaining a Boss of the Plains image were scornful of barnyards and milk cows. However, that pose began to wear mighty thin as summer heat dried the topsoil down into geological strata and the recession backed the lamb market off the bottom of the page.

It looks like after all these years of trafficking in woolies and hollow horns, we'd learn to raise chickens or grow a garden. At least in the old days, I had enough sense to save cake strings so I'd have something with which to plat and practice tying knots during lulls in the economy.

For as long as I can remember, I don't think the crease ever dried on a new hat or the soles on a pair of boots were marked up until I was wishing I had spent the money on a pair of gloves or a work coat. Winter always has been a surprise for me. Sixpacks were so much easier to gather than stove wood, and fishing poles so much more fun than axes or power saws that I never was prepared for cold weather.

The chickens that the skunks ate in Mertz weren't the real problem. It's when they killed all my mother's hens over at her ranch that I was hurt. Her cowboy had a regular factory going, converting \$8 cwt. corn into eggs costing him about \$13 a dozen.

In fact, this particular henhouse raid might have been an inside job. Mother was in business during that other depression in the '30s. Also, strange as it may sound, the skunks left her two hens and a rooster which are the perfect combination in case she ever needs to restock and let her cowboy have chickens again. She probably penciled out the cost of production and decided on taking a hedge on the corn for a better deal. I am not insisting she killed her own chickens, but I will say that as long as that spoiled cowhand was getting her to buy the feed, she had the bad end of the trade.

We had slow rains over the Thanksgiving holidays. Right after the New Year, I am going to start becoming self sufficient by giving up raising my own beef and lamb. Under that program I think I can afford to buy milk and eggs from the grocery store. It's a shame that foresight belongs to the limited few.